

Message Text

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22 10
ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00

COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 FAA-00 PM-04

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 IO-10 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /089 W
----- 002732

R 221735Z DEC 75
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7945
INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1954

CASABLANCA FOR RCAA

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAIR, DM, UR
SUBJ: SOVIET-BENIN AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT SIGNED

1. OFFICIAL BENIN MEDIA HAVE ANNOUNCED THE SIGNING DEC 17 OF A SOVIET-BENIN AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT. PRESS STATES NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN ON 15 DEC AND SOVIET DEL WAS HEADED BY VICE MIN OF CIVIL AVIATION M PAULOV. ARTICLE BOASTS THAT HENCEFORTH BENINOIS AND SOVIETS WILL BE ABLE TO FLY NON-STOP BETWEEN MOSCOW AND COTONOU.

2. SOVIET EMBASSY OFFICIALS INFORM US IT WILL TAKE A MINIMUM OF SEVERAL MONTHS TO WORK OUT TECHNICAL DETAILS BEFORE AEROFLOT SERVICE CAN ACTUALLY BEGIN. SOVIET AMB TELLS US FLIGHTS ARE EXPECTED TO BEGIN ABOUT APRIL 1 AND ROUTING PRESENTLY BEING CONSIDERED IS LAGOS/COTONOU/TRIPOLI, POSSIBLY VIENNA/MOSCOW.

3. EMBASSY IS AWARE THAT QUESTION OF AEROFLOT SERVICE HAS COME UP AT LEAST TWICE PREVIOUSLY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS.
SOVIET ASSISTANT COMMERCIAL ATTACHE SAYS BENIN AUTHORITIES
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WERE SKEPTICAL ABOUT SOVIET INTENTION ACTUALLY FOLLOW THROUGH.

ACCORDING TO HIM, THE BENINESE POINTED OUT THAT THE SOVIET AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT WAS THE FIFTH IN A SERIES OF SUCH ACCORDS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES TO ADD A LITTLE COTONOU LEG TO ESTABLISHED INTERCONTINENTAL SERVICE (THE LAST ONE BEING WITH THE SWISS), AND THAT NONE OF THE OTHERS HAVE RESULTED IN NEW AIR SERVICE.

4. COMMENT: NO DOUBT SOVIETS PERCEIVE SOME IMPORTANT NON-COMMERCIAL ADVANTAGE IN HAVING AEROFLOT MAKE THE EXTRA STOP ON ITS EXISTING ROUTE BETWEEN MOSCOW AND LAGOS. TRAFFIC BETWEEN COTONOU AND TRIPOLI/VIENNA/EASTERN EUROPE WOULD BE NEGLIGIBLE.

5. WE CONSIDER IT VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT THERE IS A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN FINALIZATION OF THIS AGREEMENT AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME, AFTER TWO YEARS OF DRIFT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS, AND THE SOVIETS' NEED OF RELIABLE AIR TRANSPORT ROUTES TO ANGOLA. NO DOUBT AN UNPUBLICIZED PROVISION OF THE AGREEMENT OR AN ORAL UNDERSTANDING, PERMITS SOVIETS TO USE COTONOU AS STOPOVER FOR ANY FLIGHT, REGARDLESS OF ROUTE OR CHARACTER OF PLANE OR LOAD. WE ASSUME THAT THE SEVERAL SOVIET AIRCRAFT THAT HAVE STOPPED IN COTONOU IN PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE BEEN BOUND TO OR FROM LUANDA. END COMMENT.

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